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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 003386

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2017

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER TELLS ADMINISTRATOR FORE "WE WILL
NOT LET PEOPLE DIE" IN THE OGADEN

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary:

11. (C) Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator Fore questioned Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles on reports of imminent starvation of children and that only half of the necessary food assistance is reaching the afflicted area of the Ogaden. The Prime Minister stressed that he would "not let people die" from starvation in the Somalia region of Ethiopia. He said he diverted trucks supporting Ethiopian troops in Somalia to help deliver food. The Prime Minister questioned the alarmist reports from NGOs of anticipated starvation in the region, asserting that food is indeed getting to the area. Food deliveries were being escorted by the Ethiopian military for security and to prevent leakage or food stolen by or purposely delivered to the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebel group. Fore said the U.S. Mission would share assessments and exchange information on the situation in the Ogaden with the Prime Minister's office, which Meles welcomed.

22. (C) On Sudan and the idea of a high level IGAD summit, the Prime Minister remarked that this was tried before and failed because Sudanese President Bashir viewed this as an internationalization of Sudan's problems and would undercut the CPA, which has a clearly defined mechanism to address problem resolution. The USAID Director Fore and Prime Minister Meles also spoke about a proposed public-private entrepreneurs' fund to promote small and medium enterprise and a possible USG-sponsored education summit, inviting university presidents and academic leaders from around the world, including Ethiopia. End Summary.

Prime Minister: We will not let people die from starvation

33. (C) Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore praised the strategic partnership between the U.S. and Ethiopia, but noted that as friends, the U.S. was committed to working with and assisting Ethiopia meet the humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden. The Administrator spoke of reports of the imminent starvation of children, that only one half of the needed food aid was reaching the afflicted area, and a number of World Food Program (WFP) food trucks were still not able to reach the needy people due to lack of escorts and obstacles. The Prime Minister remarked that his government took the NGO reports of pending disaster seriously, though questioned their accuracy. Nevertheless, while ordering the investigation of the situation as well as the NGOs that made the claims, the Prime Minister said the GOE had ordered stepped up food deliveries.

He note that the GOE diverted trucks supporting Ethiopian troops in Somalia to help deliver food aid to the Somali region of Ethiopia. The PM noted that the Ogaden faces chronic food shortages conceding that the counter insurgency operations against the ONLF have made the situation more difficult. But there is sufficient food in the pipeline, he said, to avert any crisis and Ethiopia would not allow people to die of starvation. The Prime Minister called the NGO warnings alarmist and inaccurate. NGOs usually raise the worst case scenario on the situation in the Ogaden, and he said much less emergency food aid is actually necessary. The Administrator pledges the USG's support in gaining first hand reports of the humanitarian situation in the Ogaden.

¶4. (C) Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator Fore and USAID Mission Director Anders noted that WFP trucks were not able to deliver food to primary feeding sites due to the requirement for military escort. Director Anders said WFP was cognizant of the dangers from landmines and counterinsurgency operations, but felt it could deliver food quickly and safely to some of the primary feeding sites without military escorts. The Prime Minister explained why escorts by the Ethiopian military (ENDF) Ethiopian National Defense Force) were necessary. First, he said, the ENDF provides force protection and enhances security for the trucks making deliveries. Further, it prevents leakage of food aid stolen by or purposely provided to the ONLF. Prime Minister Meles said the GOE was engaged in a counter insurgency operation in the Ogaden and the ONLF posed a serious security threat to the country and the stability of the region. Military escorts were denying food to the ONLF and keeping track of the trucks. Of the over 80 trucks which delivered food to the region, the Prime Minister said the GOE knew exactly where the trucks were and

ADDIS ABAB 00003386 002 OF 003

of any problems encountered. The military escorts would be suspended only once the security situation had improved and/or if the military escorts prevented food from reaching the targeted beneficiaries.

The Ogaden is a Security Challenge, Coordinating on Information

¶5. (C) Prime Minister Meles elaborated on the counter insurgency operation and the importance to national security and the safety of NGOs and others working in the Ogaden. He noted that recently Ethiopia was collecting information and looking at NGOs to eliminate support for the ONLF. While currently some nineteen NGOs operate in the region, a few other NGOs were suspected of supporting the ONLF by providing food and material and facilitating cash deliveries. The Prime Minister said a few NGOs negotiated with the ONLF to ensure the safety of their people in the field. The Prime Minister asserted that such actions were known and not acted on three months ago because they were not viewed as detracting from security. Now, however, NGOs and others who support the ONLF are contributing to insecurity and pose a security threat by assisting the ONLF rebel group.

¶6. (C) The Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator asked Prime Minister Meles on information of individuals and groups knowingly or unwittingly connected with the ONLF. The Prime Minister replied that he lacks information about the support of the ONLF abroad and how it collects funds in the U.S. and other places. But the GOE will continue to focus on its counter insurgency operations without placing people at undue risk and that he would not allow people to die. The Prime Minister said there is hardship for the NGOs working in the Ogaden, such as restrictions placed on their operations. But this is necessary, Meles noted, to prevent famine conditions and ensure security. On pastoralist livelihood, the Prime Minister remarked that due to insecurity created by the ONLF, the GOE could not protect the nomadic pastoralists. But as the security threat from the ONLF is contained, the GOE will

be able to protect and guarantee the livelihood of these pastoralists.

Proposal for Coordination to Enhance Accuracy of Information

¶17. (C) The Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator added that we need to get accurate information about the pockets of famine like conditions. Administrator Fore raised four areas of cooperation in providing the Prime Minister our assessment of the situation in the Ogaden region and exchanging of information to enhance accuracy of information. (1) Accurate information must be obtained on food deliveries being made to primary and secondary food distribution sites. (2) To address the GOE's concern over leakage of food aid to the ONLF, NGOs and delivery agencies like WFP should provide reports of problems encountered and how much food is reaching food distribution sites. (3) The Prime Minister suggested information on food delivered and not delivered, and information at what point mortality rates would increase. (4) information on individuals and others providing support for the ONLF, i.e. an assessment of the threat from the ONLF should be reviewed.

Sudan: An IGAD Summit not productive

¶18. (C) The Administrator asked about the prospects for peace in Sudan. Assistant Administrator Almquist asked about the possibility of a high level IGAD summit supporting peace and stability efforts in the Sudan. Meles said first that the situation in Sudan is not clear and that President Bashir is now very much unpredictable. Meles will see Bashir and special envoy Daniel Arap Moi in December. Implementing the CPA is critical to peace, Meles said, but the north is taking advantage of and playing on the weak and divisive south. Making the situation more complex, the National Congress Party (NCP) is antagonistic to the U.S. Meles said it is getting harder to understand President Bashir and more difficult to persuade him to act in the interest of regional stability. He had helped persuade Bashir to accept UN peacekeeping operations. But now it is too difficult to speak with Bashir. An IGAD Summit would not be worthwhile. Meles explained that he advocated this idea before but President Bashir protested that it would internationalize Sudan's problems and besides, the CPA had a clearly defined mechanism

ADDIS ABAB 00003386 003 OF 003

for resolving problems. On President Bashir supporting the return to their villages of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), Meles replied that the North would expect the international community to pay for programs to support returns and would not be likely to put its own resources toward this, even though the NCP would like the camps dismantled.

Entrepreneur Fund and Meeting of Academic Leaders

¶19. (SBU) The Administrator raised a USAID proposal to create a public-private entrepreneurs' fund to promote small and medium-sized enterprises. Meles praised the idea as important in enhancing development. The Administrator also raised the idea of a USG-sponsored education summit in the spring in the U.S., inviting university presidents and academic leaders from around the world, including Ethiopia. Meles welcomed this idea and said that Ethiopia was interested in distance learning opportunities. India has a program in Ethiopia, but it is expensive. Currently, Emory University has a program for exchanges with Addis Ababa University and other ties with American institutions was viewed positively.

Comment:

10.(C) The Prime Minister provided an opening for detailed cooperation and information sharing on the situation in the Ogaden to ensure accuracy of information as well as the ability to gather information on the Ogaden. We will pursue this opening to help facilitate continued efforts to open up

the Ogaden. The U.S. Mission has taken the lead in coordinating information with UN Agencies, NGOs and diplomatic corps, as well as working with the GOE to open corridors for humanitarian aid relief. Ultimately, opening of commercial food and livestock traffic, principally with Somalia, will alleviate problems. But counter insurgency operations against the ONLF which receives aid from Somali clans opposed to Ethiopia, will make this effort difficult until the GOE feels that it has the counter insurgency program under control. End comment.

11.(U) Participants: Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Chief of Staff Gebretensai; Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore; Assistant Administrator Kate Almquist; Special Assistant Barbara Feinstein, USAID Director Glenn Anders, and Ambassador (notetaker).

112. (U) Director Fore has cleared this cable.
YAMAMOTO